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# Congress of the United States

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

#### Hearing on the Status of the State Department's Implementation of the Accountability Review Board Recommendations

September 17, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing. I know every Member of this panel is dedicated to ensuring that our work honors the memories of the four Americans who were killed in Benghazi—Ambassador Chris Stevens, Sean Smith, Tyrone Woods, and Glen Doherty.

I want to thank our colleague, Representative Schiff, for proposing the topic of today's hearing. Too often over the past two years, the congressional investigation into what happened in Benghazi has devolved into unseemly partisanship. Today, we have an opportunity to focus on reform. How can we learn from the past to make things better in the future? This kind of oversight can be productive, it can be critical, and it can sometimes even be tedious, but it can also save people's lives.

I sincerely hope the Select Committee will stay on the course of constructive reform and keep this goal as our North Star. It would be a disservice to everyone involved to be lured off this path by partisan politics.

Today, we will review the recommendations of the Accountability Review Board, which was chaired by Ambassador Thomas Pickering and Admiral Michael Mullen, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During our previous investigation in the House Oversight Committee, Chairman Gowdy and I heard directly from both men about how seriously they took their roles. Ambassador Pickering called it a "debt of honor."

Their report was independent, it was adopted unanimously by all Board members, and it was a blistering examination of what went wrong at the State Department. They made 29 recommendations, and Secretary Clinton accepted all of them.

After they issued their report, the State Department Inspector General issued his own report finding that "the Department wasted no time addressing the recommendations." The Department has been working on implementing these recommendations for the past year and a half, and Congress should ensure that it finishes the job.

Today, I would like our witnesses to provide an update on the status of several of the Board's recommendations.

First, the Board found that the Department's response to the deteriorating security situation in Benghazi was "inadequate." It was inadequate at the post in Benghazi, at the Embassy in Tripoli, and here in Washington. Ambassador Pickering explained that the post did not take action despite crossing several "tripwires" that should have caused officials to review security more closely and develop a stronger response. The Board recommended that the Department change its procedures to make sure that security breaches are reviewed immediately.

Today, the Department reports that it has created a new process that requires posts to report "tripwires" as soon as they are crossed so security officials can review them immediately and take action if necessary. I want to know if this process is now fully operational, and, if so, how it has been working so far.

The Board also found that we should not have relied so heavily on local militia groups, like the February 17 militia, to protect our post. The Board called this reliance "misplaced," and it found that these security forces were "poorly skilled." The Board recommended that the Department strengthen security "beyond the traditional reliance on host government security support in high risk, high threat posts."

Today, the Department reports that it has 17 new Marine Security Guard Detachments and another new Marine unit to enhance security in changing threat environments. In addition, the State Department is now using new funding from Congress to hire 151 new personnel in the Bureau of Diplomatic Security, or DS. I want to hear from our witnesses about whether these actions are sufficient, or whether we need to do more.

The Board also found fault with a Deputy Assistant Secretary within DS who denied repeated requests for additional security in Benghazi. At the time, this official oversaw the security of all 275 diplomatic posts around the world.

To address this problem, the Department created a new position to focus exclusively on the security needs of roughly 30 posts experiencing the highest threats. The Board praised this action, stating that it could be "a positive first step if integrated into a sound strategy for DS reorganization." Today, I want to hear from the State Department specifically about how this new position is working and whether they believe we should make additional changes.

Everyone understands that diplomacy, by its nature, sometimes requires us to be in very dangerous places. Our diplomats work in high-threat environments, and although we cannot eliminate every risk, we must do everything we can to keep Americans as safe as possible when they are serving overseas.

With that, I want to conclude by recognizing the tremendous sacrifices that are made every single day around the world by our diplomatic corps, the intelligence community, and our military servicemembers on behalf of the American people.

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